

Pendleton-Coles House
319 Letcher Avenue
Lexington (independent city)
Virginia

HABS No. VA-898

HABS
VA,
82-LEX,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PENDLETON-COLES HOUSE

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Location: 319 Letcher Avenue, Lexington, Virginia.

Present Owner: The Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia.

Present Occupant: Colonel and Mrs. Robert H. Knox.

Present Use: Faculty housing.

Significance: The house is primarily of architectural interest, as an example of Gothic cottages designed in the nineteenth century for country living. It closely resembles the "Rustic Cottage Style" of Alexander Jackson Davis (shown in Rural Residences, part 3, 1837, by Davis).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

There are no available records as to the original owner or the date that the house was built. The present owner, the Virginia Military Institute, acquired the house in 1928 from Mrs. Walter Coles. Mrs. Coles inherited the house from her father, Colonel Edmund Pendleton, who purchased it in 1881 from the widow of Dr. Robert Madison (from Rockbridge County deed records). Dr. Madison acquired the lot in 1872 from Samuel McDowell Moore but the deed is not clear as to whether a house was included. The tax records of 1873 show that both a house and lot were transferred from Mr. Moore to Dr. Madison. The house so transferred can be traced in the tax records as far back as 1853. It is known that Mr. Moore purchased land on which the house was built in 1846 (from local deed book).

The architect is unknown. If the house was built in the early 1850's, it would coincide with the period during which A.J. Davis was designing faculty residences for the Institute, in the course of which he visited Lexington (from his diary, in the New York Public Library). It is possible that plans for this house were adapted from those for one of his cottages.

B. Historical Events:

Colonel Edmund Pendleton was prominent as a Virginia state legislator, a member of the Board of Visitors of the Institute and a graduate of the first class of 1842, and a former officer in the Confederate forces. His granddaughter, Miss Lily Coles, was married in this house to George C. Marshall in 1902.

PART II. Architectural Information

A. General Statement:

Two two-storied house is a typical example of the Gothic cottages popular during the mid-nineteenth century, though not prevalent in this region. Its outstanding features are the arched windows with diamond panes and the decorative bargeboard around the gables.

The condition and maintenance of the house are good.

B. Exterior:

Overall dimensions: 34'3" x 65'6" (excluding bay windows).

Foundation: Limestone.

Wall construction: Board and batten walls, painted white, with brick noggin; structure and frame - wood stud.

Porches: Front and back.

Chimneys: One, of four parts, at intersection of roof; one, of two parts, in rear portion of house.

Doors and doorways: Front doorway has tudor arch transom with diamond panes and side lights, also diamond paned. Door is four-paneled, painted white. Trim around doorway, transom and side lights is painted dark green.

Windows and shutters: The three bay windows - one on each side of the ground floor and one in front on the second floor - have square tops with diamond panes. Two front windows on the ground floor have four-centered Gothic arch tops with four lights. Windows at the back of the house have rounded arches. There are four bull's eye windows in the attic, one on each side. The bay windows and other side windows have metal canopies. Louvered shutters are painted dark green.

Roof: Design is A-roof cruciform; there are alternating bands of rectangular and hexagonal slate shingles; open valleys; half-round gutters; metal roof over front porch. Sawn bargeboard has quatrefoil cut-outs in front and spearhead on the side, painted dark green. There is a wood finial cornice on top.

C. Interior:

Breakfast room appears to have been added later by enclosing part of back porch. Hall across back of house on second floor was added by partitioning part of back bedroom.

Stairways: Two small circular stairways - one in front hall and one in back hall. Wood spindles and newel are turned, painted white; wood handrail is stained dark. Front stairway is open on underside and is narrower than back stairway.

Floors: Random width pine.

Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster and paper.

Doorways and doors: Door casing is of Greek type with pointed tops and dog ears, ogee back band, throughout most of house. Wooden doors are four-panel, flat.

Hardware: Rim locks throughout house, machine-made, probably original; china knobs.

Lighting: Modern electric lighting.

Heating: Originally by fireplaces, now by gas central heating.

D. Site:

General setting: just outside the gate of the Institute; the house, built on a slope, faces northwest.

Enclosure: Iron rail fence, painted black.

Outbuildings: None.

Walks: Cement.

Landscaping: Simple.

Prepared by Mary Stuart Gilliam
and Louise P. Moore, with the
assistance of Nathaniel Neblett,
Architect, of Lynchburg, Virginia

For further information (occasionally of a conflicting nature) on the Pendleton-Coles House see:

Lyle, Royster, Jr. and Simpson, Pamela. The Architecture of Historic Lexington. Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1977.